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APPROACHES TO CHANGE: THE PEOPLE AND THE WORK CONTEXT

We suggested in the previous chapter that many people in contemporary organizations are underchallenged and underutilized in their jobs. As a consequence, some such individuals are neither as productive nor as satisfied at work as they might be; others gradually adapt to this unsatisfactory state of affairs and accept it as their lot in life.

What might be done to improve the match between people and their work, and thereby improve both organizational productivity and the quality of employee work experiences? How can we achieve a better fit between what people want from work and what they get from it? How can we increase the congruence between what people are asked to do on the job and what they are willing and able to do?

Behavioral scientists, over the last several decades, have generated a buffet of ideas and techniques for dealing with these questions. We review a number of these devices in Chapters 2 and 3. In this chapter we focus on four widely used approaches that have to do with changing either people or the setting in which they work. They are:

1. Changing the *people* who do the work, through improved selection, placement, and training procedures.

2. Changing *other people*, specifically supervisors, by improving supervisory selection and training practices.
3. Changing the *context* in which the work is performed by adding workplace amenities and improving the scheduling of working time.
4. Changing the *consequences* of work by altering the contingencies that determine the benefits (and costs) to employees of hard and effective work.

Each of these approaches is, in its own right, critical to the competent management of people at work. It is hard to imagine an effective work organization in which managers do not give serious attention to selection and training, to supervision, to the work context, and to the contingencies that link what employees do and what they receive. Moreover, we will argue later in this book (Chapters 6 and 8) that the success and persistence of work redesign is profoundly affected by some of these organizational practices. Managed poorly, they can render impotent even well-conceived and well-executed changes in jobs; managed well, they can reinforce and amplify the beneficial effects of well-designed work.

This chapter, however, deals with the *direct effects* on work productivity and employee satisfaction of changes in the people and the work context. As will be seen below, attempts to improve organizational functioning that rely solely on these approaches often fail, and none of them appear useful as a general "fix" for organizational problems. This chapter explores some of the reasons why this is so, and sets the stage for Chapter 3, in which we examine the redesign of jobs as an alternative strategy for improving the match between people and their work.

CHANGING PEOPLE: SELECTION AND TRAINING

Selection and training are among the most popular devices for dealing with people in organizations and are among the approaches to change about which we know the most. Moreover, selection and training have the advantage of dealing directly with the person-job relationship, rather than with the organizational context in which that relationship exists.

The basic idea is that if people are placed on jobs for which they are well suited and well trained, they will be personally satisfied and will perform effectively. What must be done, then, is to locate and attract to the organization people who are "right" for the jobs that are to be done—and then to train them to perform those jobs as competently as possible.

A great deal of effort has gone into the development of selection devices and training procedures in organizations. Job analysis methodologies, for example, provide rather precise means of identifying what skills are required for successful performance of almost any job (McCormick, 1976). Once job requirements are identified, numerous tests and placement models are available to ensure that all employees on a given job have at least the minimum capability to perform adequately (Dunnette, 1966; Guion, 1976). And when training is required to bring employee knowledge and skill up to the level needed for excellent performance, the capability to design and carry out that training is readily available (Bass and Vaughan, 1966; Goldstein, 1974).

Such procedures typically achieve their intended goals quite well and efficiently. And if the nature of the mismatch between the person and the job is that the person is not fully qualified for the position, then the use of existing selection and training procedures is appropriate and likely to be effective.

But if the problem is that people already are *overqualified* to do the work to which they will be assigned, as is often the case for jobs in the lower regions of organizations, then selection and training procedures may not help very much; indeed, they may actually worsen the fit between the people and the jobs they do (O'Toole, 1977).

What, for example, if the distribution of people and jobs in contemporary U.S. society approximated that shown in Fig. 2.1? The figure suggests that there are relatively more "simple" (routine, repetitive, easy-to-perform) jobs than there are "complex" (challenging, varied, uncertain) jobs. And there are relatively more "complex" (bright, skilled, upwardly mobile) people than there are "simple" (dull, uneducated, nonambitious) people. If jobs and people were distributed this way in the population, how could selection and training improve the overall fit between the people and the work they do in society?

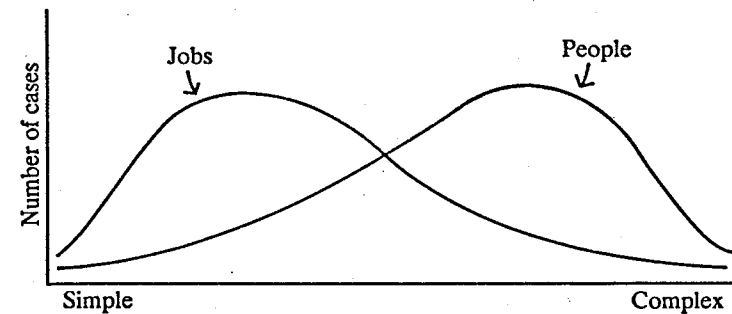


Fig. 2.1 Hypothetical distributions of people and jobs on a dimension of general complexity.

It appears that such devices would be appropriate only if they were used to select the *less* talented individuals for the simple jobs or to "de-train" more talented people so that they could survive psychologically and perform effectively on those jobs. However, such uses of selection and training are unlikely to gain wide acceptance. It would be difficult for managers to admit to themselves (let alone to their external constituencies and clients) that they are systematically selecting untalented or poorly qualified employees for the basic jobs in their organizations. Instead, public relations considerations (not to mention the personal attitudes of employing managers) tend to ensure that when selection, placement, and training techniques are used, they are used to upgrade (not downgrade) the quality of individuals sought and selected for work in the organization. Moreover, most managers hold the very reasonable view that the pool of human resources available for doing the work of the organization should be as rich and high-level as possible. This view prevails even when that resource pool is mostly unused in carrying out the work of the organization.

So we continue to see job candidates ordered in terms of their measured job-relevant knowledge and skill, and organizations selecting the "cream" of the applicants for employment, even if the lower quartile of those applying would be fully competent to do the work effectively. And we continue to see new employees given sophisticated training courses, even if the employees actually would be able to carry out the work with only a day or so of on-the-job training under the tutelage of an experienced employee. One airline,

for example, routinely provides full-time training to its reservations agents for more than a week right after they are hired—even though agents who have worked on the job only a few weeks complain of the monotony and routineness of the work.

Even when the nature of the person-job mismatch is recognized as one of overqualification rather than ineptitude, the kinds of solutions proposed still often involve attempts to change the people to fit the jobs. One of the silliest is a \$5 million plant donated by the General Electric Company to the Cleveland school system to support the training of students for assembly line work! And an Assistant Secretary of Labor suggested in a memo to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1972 that perhaps the problem of underemployment would be solved if the Office of Education would just stop educating so many people (reported by O'Toole, 1975).

Despite what seems an obvious overuse of selection and training procedures in attempting to fit people to undemanding jobs, these practices are likely to remain with us for two reasons. First, we know *how* to select, place, and train people. We tend to use heavily those techniques we are good at, sometimes regardless of their appropriateness for a given problem.

Secondly, it is easy to misperceive the *causes* of the problems we observe among people at work. When someone is behaving badly or performing poorly on the job, the human tendency is to attribute the reason for the difficulty to the person rather than to the situation (Jones and Nisbett, 1971). Following from that attribution, the cure that is prescribed typically is somehow to change the people—either by hiring “better” people, or by educating the people now on the job so they will know how to behave more competently.

If, however, the *real* root of the observed problems is that people are overqualified for the work they do (for instance, a talented person chaffing at an overcontrolled, routine job), then selection and training procedures are unlikely to help and may even lead to a worsening of the observed difficulties. Whereupon, the same perceptual biases might operate once again, and we would hear managers complaining, “I don’t know about this younger generation—we took the very best people we could find, we spent lots of time training them, and they’re still goofing off and screwing up on the job. What’s wrong with them, anyhow?”

This refrain is frequently heard in these days of decently educated people with high personal aspirations for their life at work—

whether they are sitting at a desk in an air conditioned office or plugging away at assembly line work. And if the curves shown in Fig. 2.1 are even approximately accurate, we may expect the problem to worsen as the supply of well-educated, upwardly mobile workers continues to expand.

The arguments made here are *not* intended to suggest that selection, placement, and training are irrelevant to the effective utilization of human resources in organizations. On the contrary, when jobs are complex and challenging, it is critical to recruit competent people to work on them and to provide those people with the training they need to perform their jobs well. To be underqualified for a challenging, involving job is to be highly stressed and can lead to psychological or behavioral withdrawal from the job. The very real risks of ignoring questions of employee competence when jobs are expanded or “enriched” are explored later in this book.

So devices for identifying talented people and for increasing their task-relevant knowledge and skill have an important place in organizational management. The point of this section is that such devices often are overused in organizations and can result in negative consequences both for people and for their employing organizations when the real problem is that the people are *over-* rather than *under*qualified for the work they do.

CHANGING OTHER PEOPLE: SELECTING AND TRAINING SUPERVISORS

When attempts to select and train job incumbents for more effective on-the-job performance fail, managers often turn their attention to those who supervise the work and the workers. The idea is to select and train supervisors so that their behaviors elicit high productivity and high job satisfaction on the part of their subordinates. Responsibility for subordinate productivity and morale is placed on the shoulders of the boss, and the task is to find and develop leaders who are able to mold their subordinates into a committed, productive, and satisfied group of employees. Like the first approach reviewed, this one also has to do with changing people—but this time the people who manage the work rather than the people who actually do it.

The most efficient way to increase the quality of supervision, of course, would be to identify the characteristics of people who are

superb leaders and then systematically to select those people for supervisory jobs. The problem is that decades of research have failed to identify attributes of people that reliably and powerfully predict effective supervisory performance. Long lists of "traits" held by good leaders have been generated—including self-confidence, intelligence (so long as it doesn't exceed by too much the intelligence of the people supervised), sociability, ambition, perseverance, willpower, absence of neuroses, and even height. But unfortunately the relationship between these traits and subordinate effectiveness is generally so low that their usefulness in selecting leaders is virtually nil.

In recent years, "assessment centers" have become an increasingly popular way of selecting individuals for managerial positions. These centers, typically involving one- or two-day situational tests in which candidates are observed and evaluated as they work on simulations of real managerial problems, have been shown to be better at predicting *future managerial success* (such as promotion) than are traditional paper-and-pencil tests (MacKinnon, 1975). However, assessment centers are not specifically oriented to selecting individuals who will be excellent supervisors of lower-level workers in organizations, and their validity for this purpose is uncertain.

In sum, attempts to identify and select excellent supervisors by measuring their enduring personal attributes are on the wane, largely because it has not been possible to identify those attributes that are key to successful supervisors. On the other hand, attempts to obtain top-quality supervision through leadership training are very much alive and well throughout the world. The idea is that if we cannot reliably identify those people who are sure to be top-notch supervisors, then perhaps we can take the people whom we do select (by whatever method) and train them to be effective supervisors of people and work.

So we have academic courses on theories of leadership and management, off-site human relations training, skills-oriented courses in which supervisors role-play effective behaviors, unstructured training sessions where participants share their experiences and learn from one another, and numerous other supervisory training techniques. Almost every moderately large organization sponsors managerial and supervisory training of one kind or another, based on one or another theory of leader effectiveness (Hinrichs, 1976).

There is no question that such training courses help expand the cognitive knowledge and self-understanding of the participants, and that they contribute to the participants' general education. Moreover, trainees usually find the courses stimulating and enjoyable: If a course or experience is well designed and competently executed, postcourse evaluations usually reveal that participants enjoyed the sessions, felt they learned a great deal, and would recommend the course to colleagues without hesitation.

What is at question is how much difference such training makes in the quality of the supervision that the subordinates of the trainee receive after the boss returns from the course and, ultimately, whether the overall effectiveness of the supervisor's work unit is improved as a result of the training received. For this more critical question there is less trustworthy evidence (measures of actual quality of supervision and unit effectiveness are much harder to obtain than are trainees' postcourse evaluations), but findings to date are not optimistic about the long-term effects of such training experiences (Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, and Weick, 1970).

Why does supervisory training not have a greater impact on the productivity and work satisfaction of subordinates? There are at least three reasons.

1. *It is not altogether clear what the supervisors should be taught.* Should we train supervisors to keep their hands off subordinates as much as they can? Or to be very closely involved with them but only to help them develop their own approach to doing the work? Or to be closely involved and highly directive about what to do when? Or to be very democratic or participative in dealing with subordinates? All of these strategies work—sometimes. Other times they do not.

Then, perhaps, we should train supervisors to be *responsive* to their subordinates, to the imperatives of the task and technology, and to the organizational context in which the work is done—adapting their leadership styles and strategies to the situations in which they must carry out their leadership activities. This seems somehow more realistic, but what aspects of the people, the work, and the workplace are most critical, and what supervisory behaviors are best under which circumstances?

The hard fact of the matter is that we do not yet know for sure.

There has been lots of research on "consideration" and "initiation of structure" as leadership styles, for example.¹ However, it is not yet clear exactly how these important dimensions of leadership style affect the productivity of subordinates (although there does seem to be a reasonably stable finding that subordinates are more *satisfied* when supervisors behave considerately than when they do not). Research currently is delving into the contingencies that determine when "structuring" and "considerate" styles will be best for productivity and satisfaction. But at present we do not know enough about the circumstances under which one or another supervisory style is optimal, and it is starting to look as if the answer that eventually emerges is going to be fairly complex (Kerr, Schriesheim, Murphy, and Stogdill, 1974).

Indeed, there are so many complexities emerging from research on leadership style that we are beginning to doubt whether it will ever be realistic to satisfactorily "program" a supervisor about how to behave in different leadership situations. Instead, perhaps, the emphasis should be on identifying and selecting for supervisory positions those individuals who *intuitively* seem to know how they should behave in different circumstances. But this strategy, of course, brings us back to the original leader *selection* problem discussed earlier—and to our history of failure to solve that problem.

2. *It is difficult to get supervisors to transfer their learning from the training setting to the actual work setting.* Most supervisory training courses take place away from the workplace to free the trainees from the interruptions and distractions that inevitably occur at work and to provide them with a setting specifically designed to enhance their learning. The problem is that even as the supervisor is changing as a result of the training, the workplace is not. And the outcome frequently is a supervisor who returns from training full of new knowledge, skill, and resolve—only to face the same unmanageable tasks,

1 Consideration reflects the degree to which leaders relate warmly to subordinates, show trust in them and listen to them, are willing to explain their actions, and so on. Initiation of structure is the degree to which leaders actively organize and structure the work and specify who is to do what under various task and organizational circumstances. The two dimensions of style are independent: it is possible to be high on one and low on the other, high on both or low on both.

structures, and people that had to be faced before. It turns out that the gap between the learning environment and the working environment often is so large that the supervisor is unable to build a bridge and apply the new lessons to the old situation (see Fleishman, 1955). Instead, the new ideas and skills tend gradually to fade away in the face of the old tasks and people and structures, and after a few months all that may remain of the training course is the glow that comes from having participated in a stimulating and enjoyable experience.

3. *The actual behavioral style of a supervisor may be largely out of his or her control in any case.* Until rather recently most research and theory about supervisory style, and most training aimed at improving organizational functioning by changing leader behavior, was based on the assumption that the style of the leader *caused* changes in the work behavior and satisfaction of subordinates. It now appears, however, that the style of the leader may in many circumstances be as much a consequence of subordinate behavior as it is a cause of that behavior (e.g., Lowin and Craig, 1968; Farris and Lim, 1969). Specifically, if a supervisor is charged with managing a group of subordinates who are competent in carrying out the work and pleasantly cooperative with the supervisor, then the supervisor may "naturally" behave in ways that are considerate of the employees and be very participative with them in making work-related decisions. But if the subordinates are clearly incompetent in their jobs, and moreover behave with active hostility toward the supervisor, the "natural" course of action may be a much more structuring, directive, and autocratic style.

This is not to say that supervisory behavior makes no difference to the people being supervised. Obviously it does. But many supervisory training experiences appear to be based on assumptions that (1) supervisors are substantially in control of their behavior vis-a-vis subordinates and (2) supervisory behavior influences subordinate attitudes and work behavior much more than vice versa. There is a reason to be suspicious of both assumptions—and therefore to be skeptical about the degree to which substantial improvements in employee work behavior and satisfaction can be wrought simply by training supervisors to behave differently.

The cautions and skepticism expressed in this section are not intended as an unqualified damnation of selection and training activi-

ties that focus on supervisors. Without question, even ad hoc selection procedures can weed out individuals who would be grossly incompetent as managers of people. And training procedures can help supervisors learn *not* to engage in behaviors that are known to be ineffective or destructive—such as excessively close supervision, wholesale abdication of responsibility for the work or absence from the workplace, gross favoritism, and so forth.

But when the work situation is basically satisfactory—or distressingly unsatisfactory—reliance on supervisory training as a strategy for organizational change and improvement may be little more than whistling in the wind. Consider, for example, an organization in which the jobs being done by rank-and-file employees are inherently interesting and motivating, employees feel they are paid well and fairly, and people are generally satisfied with their co-workers and with working conditions. In this circumstance, supervision is relatively easy. And while supervisory training may be useful to prepare managers for more responsible positions, it is unlikely to lead to major improvements in the trainee's work unit—simply because few improvements are needed.

If, on the other hand, subordinates are frustrated and bored with highly fractionated, repetitive work, and if they also are furious about unsatisfactory compensation and working conditions, then there may be *no* way that the supervisor can behave vis-a-vis his or her subordinates to engender high morale and productivity among them. In this case, the reasons for the observed problems lie more in the work and in the organization than in the behavior of the supervisor, and improvements in the managerial style of the supervisor are unlikely to have much of a direct effect. The perceptive manager will, in such circumstances, focus his or her energy upward (or outward) to improve those organizational systems that are creating the difficulties—including how the work itself is designed—rather than attempt to work directly with subordinates to create a happy and motivated work force despite them (Oldham, 1976b).

CHANGING THE CONTEXT OF THE WORK

A third approach to improving individual-organization relationships focuses on the context in which the work is done. The idea is to make the organization a personally pleasant and socially satisfying place for

employees to be. And the hope is that if the work environment is sufficiently congenial, attractive, and convenient, then people will be both productive in their work and satisfied with their organizational experiences.

This approach has its roots in the "human relations" school of management, which developed from the seminal research conducted at the Hawthorne plant of Western Electric (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939). These researchers found (contrary to their expectations) that alterations of working conditions such as rest pauses and illumination were *not* key in reducing employee boredom or increasing efficiency. Instead, it appeared that the work-group culture and the "informal organization" that existed among employees had an overriding influence on how employees experienced their work and how they reacted to it. The implication of the research, then, was that improvements in the social context of the work could increase the meaningfulness of even the most boring of jobs in an organization. Moreover, increases in both productivity and worker satisfaction would be expected when such improvements were made.

As a result of the Hawthorne studies, managers and social scientists gave increasing attention to improvements in the human relations climate of work organizations. Early innovations included counseling programs, courses to improve communication skills, increased teamwork and participation among rank-and-file workers, and more considerate, people-oriented supervision (Whyte, 1956). More recently, attempts to improve the work context have extended well beyond the early focus on interpersonal relationships and range from putting carpeting on the floor and music in the walls, to making work stations clean and quiet, and even to installing gymnasiums and swimming pools at the workplace, making some organizations appear to be more like country clubs than industrial plants. Currently very popular are innovations in work scheduling (such as flexitime and the four-day workweek) that are intended to make attendance at work more convenient and to reduce the difficulty of managing the boundary between work and the rest of one's life (Cohen and Gadon, 1978).

It is clear that most people like and appreciate satisfying social relationships at work, more convenient schedules, and on-the-job amenities. And for that reason, people may come to work more regularly and remain with the organization longer than they would if the workplace were unpleasant and work schedules inconvenient. So

improving aspects of the work context can directly improve the quality of worklife for employees, which is of merit in its own right and which sometimes results in reduced absenteeism and turnover.

But what about work motivation and productivity? When the context is especially pleasant and satisfying will employees try especially hard to do a good job? Unfortunately, there are no data of which we are aware to support the view that improvements in the work context or the human relations climate of an organization will result in long-term gains in productivity or work efficiency. Indeed, those short-term gains that sometimes are noted when contextual improvements are made often are described using the name of the plant where the human relations movement began—that is, the “Hawthorne effect.” Hawthorne effects cannot be counted on to persist over time.

Why not? Shouldn't people be willing to provide hard work on their jobs in return for the receipt of workplace amenities from management? Perhaps they *should* be, but it turns out the people do not adhere to a “norm of reciprocity” nearly as faithfully as some might wish them to. Instead, people come rather quickly to accept improved amenities as their legitimate lot in life and are likely to experience distress and anger if those amenities subsequently are taken away.

One of us recently had his office air conditioned. He was initially quite pleased about that. On hot summer days, it is now more likely than before that he will spend a full day at the office. But he does not find himself feeling constant gratitude to his university for the air conditioning, not even in the heat of August, nor does he feel that he owes the university any special loyalty or any extra on-the-job effort because university managers were nice enough to air condition his work space. If, however, the air conditioning unit were to be removed some July in a burst of energy-saving consciousness, then you can be sure that your author would notice the fact—and would be most unhappy with his employer.²

2 These reactions fit well with the arguments made by Frederick Herzberg (1976) that while aspects of the work context (which he calls “hygiene factors”) are irrelevant to the level of *work motivation* exhibited by employees, they can lead to heightened employee dissatisfaction when they are mismanaged.

In sum, improving the context of the work may further reinforce employees' positive reactions to an already well-designed and well-managed organization, at least in the short term. But they are unlikely to be useful in compensating for work that is inherently meaningless, for a grossly inequitable compensation system, for capricious control procedures, or for discriminatory personnel practices. When basic features of the organization such as these are at issue, it surely is a better idea to deal with them directly than to try to gloss them over by introducing contextual amenities or improving the “human relations” climate of the workplace.

CHANGING REWARD CONTINGENCIES

By managing the contingencies between work behavior and organizational rewards, it often is possible to influence employee productivity directly and at the same time to create important spin-off effects on the quality of employees' work experiences. The idea is that when productive behavior is rewarded by the organization, people will work more effectively and thereby gain valued rewards that enhance their own satisfaction with the work and the organization.

Most commonly used in this regard are personal reinforcement by the supervisor (such as the pat on the back for a job well done) and pay (such as piece-rate incentive systems, end-of-year bonuses, and so on). For such rewards to be effective in eliciting and maintaining productivity, a number of conditions must be met. First, the reward must be *valued* by the individual. If you receive a trinket for your charm bracelet for doing especially good work, but do not even have a charm bracelet, the potency of that reward for eliciting good work in the future will be limited. If, however, you prize your bracelet and are always on the lookout for new and interesting charms to add, then the reward may work wonders.

Second, the reward must be administered on a *contingent* basis, that is, only when the desired behavior has actually occurred. If management runs around and hands out charms with wild abandon, perhaps in hopes of making everyone happy, then perhaps everyone will be happy (at least those who like charms), but the motivational impact of the reward will have been lost. Or if at odd intervals the supervisor appears with a charm and says, “Good for you,” you may

spend as much time wondering why those particular moments were chosen to pass out the rewards as you do working. And you may guess wrong.

But if the reward comes only when you sign up a new customer, then it gradually will become clear to you that signing up new customers is what is wanted and what is rewarded. Thus it is not sufficient that rewards be administered contingent upon the desired behavior; in addition, the employee must understand what it is that is wanted and rewarded. To meet this third condition, there must be a way to identify or measure the target behavior such that the reward giver and the potential reward receiver can agree when the behavior is present and when it is not.

In recent years, the fine old principle of administering organizational rewards contingent upon effective performance has been dressed up in the rather elaborate and sophisticated clothes of "behavior modification" as espoused by B. F. Skinner (see, for example, Luthans and Kreitner, 1975). The basic principles outlined above are adhered to in behavior modification programs, of course, but numerous refinements having to do with behavior measurement and reward schedules are added. One of the most important is the idea that after the desired behavior is being regularly exhibited, the reward giver should cease rewarding the behavior every time it occurs, and move to a variable schedule of reinforcement. Reinforcements appear on an occasional and (to the reward receiver) unpredictable schedule, and work becomes a bit like fishing: You keep casting because you know you get a strike every so often, but you don't know whether it will be the next cast, or the one after that, or five casts later. But so long as the fish occasionally cooperate, you keep casting; in technical terms, you show high "resistance to extinction."

The use of performance-contingent rewards would seem to have a great deal of potential for shaping employee behavior (and, indirectly, employee attitudes) at work. Indeed, some commentators have suggested that this approach should be standard operating procedure in work organizations. For example, Fein (1976a, p. 46) reports:

In a study of over 400 plants across the United States, I found that when these plants instituted work measurement, their productivity rose an average of 14.6 percent. When plants instituted wage incentives where previously there was work measurement,

productivity rose an added 42.9 percent. The average increase from no-measurement to incentives was 63.6 percent.

Yet financial incentives and other organizational rewards do not always increase the level of motivated, productive behavior of the people to whom the rewards are given, even when those rewards are delivered contingent upon effective work behavior. Why not? Leaving aside the possibility that an incentive program might be poorly designed on technical grounds, three possibilities suggest themselves.

Getting Enough. At some point, employees may have obtained all of a particular reward they want. Praise and compliments from the supervisor, a frequently used reward in organizational behavior modification programs, would seem particularly prone to the satiation problem: If your boss were consistently to compliment you each time you complete a satisfactory piece of work, those compliments might eventually lose their reinforcing properties or even become irritating.

Those who vigorously advocate the use of incentive programs based on pay sometimes argue as if people are primarily (if not exclusively) oriented toward maximization of the economic benefit they receive from the hours they spend at work. However, if the last several decades of research on behavior in organizations has taught us anything, it is that people at work seek simultaneously many kinds of satisfactions, not just those with economic roots.

Any theory of managerial practice that assumes that a single motivational factor will suffice to understand employee behavior at work is assuredly incomplete—whether the factor espoused has to do with motivation for economic gain, for satisfying social relationships, or for personal growth and development. So those who seek to shape employee behavior at work must be careful to use rewards that are in fact valued by the target employees, and they must be watchful to make sure that the motivational properties of those rewards do not wear off significantly over time as employees become accustomed to them and, perhaps, even tired of them.

Becoming Dependent. Another problem with the use of behavior-contingent rewards has to do with the quality of the relationship that develops between the persons who are giving the rewards and those who receive them. If we were to attempt to control your behavior as powerfully as we could, we would first identify a reward about which you care very deeply (perhaps money, if you are so poor

that your next meal is an uncertainty; or public praise and recognition if you are feeling well fed but terribly unappreciated). Then we would provide that reward to you, immediately and reliably, whenever you engage in the behavior that we desired. Soon, we predict, you would be doing exactly what we wanted you to do.

But you might also be resentful of our tactics and perhaps feeling pretty miserable about yourself for your slavish obedience. It is noteworthy that many of the early (and highly successful) applications of the principles of behavior modification have involved animals (such as pigeons), children, or institutionalized adults such as prisoners or mental patients. Individuals in each of these groups are *necessarily* dependent on powerful others for many of the things they most want and need, and their behavior usually can be shaped with relative ease.

But what works for the animals and the children may be met with serious resistance on the part of adults who have a strong wish to believe that they are personally in control of their lives and destinies. Many observers (e.g., Argyris, 1957; Whyte, 1977) have pointed out the dysfunctional consequences that can develop when normal, healthy adults find themselves in a relationship where they are wholly dependent on another person whom they must please in order to obtain the rewards they most value. In such circumstances, overt hostility, personal withdrawal, and even active deception and sabotage are not uncommon reactions.

Similarly, it has been shown that people become unpleasantly aroused when their experienced freedom to control their own behavior is curtailed (Brehm, 1972). Such arousal, or "reactance," often sets in motion attempts to restore a sense of control over one's destiny—sometimes by altering how one perceives or evaluates the situation, other times by taking specific behavioral action. In work settings, attempts to regain a sense of behavioral freedom might be expressed by deliberately engaging in prohibited behaviors, by colluding with others to "beat the system," or by directing aggressive feelings toward the reward giver, who is viewed as responsible for the threat to freedom.

Taken together, feelings of dependency and reactance can seriously compromise even technically sophisticated systems for linking rewards (and punishments) to desired employee behaviors. It is ironic that the more potent the contingent reward (and therefore the better

the system should function from a technical perspective), the more likely it is that unanticipated and dysfunctional responses will be exhibited by those whose behavior is supposed to be shaped by the reward system.³

Experiencing Motivational Conflict. Finally, vigorous use of performance-contingent rewards may elicit conflicting motivational states on the part of employees and thereby induce internal stress and tension rather than the intended high level of performance motivation.

Consider the following question that might be asked of an employee about the perceived consequences of hard and effective work on the job:

What happens when you try to work especially hard and productively on this job?

This question, which has its roots in the "expectancy theory" of work motivation (Vroom, 1964) can be an excellent device for gaining understanding of what the motivational pulls and restraints are to productive work on the job. The list generated by an individual whose job is lifting bricks from a pile onto a sled (to be carted away somewhere by someone else) might look something like this:

1. I get more tired, and I get grouchy.
2. My back starts to hurt earlier in the day, and if it's hot I'm likely to have a headache before noon.
3. The other guys kid me about being a rate-buster.
4. I start to wonder if I'm wearing out my body, and how many years I can keep this up.

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- 3 Dependency-related problems with incentive programs sometimes can be reduced if the affected employees are involved in the design and management of those programs (Lawler, 1977). When employees participate in the design and installation of an incentive program, they probably will understand it better. In addition, they may feel that they "own" the program, and therefore that they (not the organization) are in control of it. Under such circumstances, the potency of the incentives to affect attitudes and behavior should remain high, but the risk of dependency-induced negative reactions should diminish considerably.

5. I think of myself more as a mule than as a person who has a brain in his head.

Not an inspiring list, and one that would lead us to a fairly confident prediction that the person would be *unlikely* to try to work very hard on this job. The harder the person works, the more the *negative* outcomes.

Now imagine that a sophisticated piece-rate system is installed for the brick-loading job, in which a substantial monetary bonus is tied to the quantity of bricks moved by an individual in a day's work. Moreover, imagine that supervisors are trained to provide praise and recognition for individuals who handle a large number of bricks, and that individuals who consistently handle the most bricks over a several-month period are promised first opportunity to transfer to a less burdensome job.

With this change, we add some new items to the list of outcomes that the brick loader views as being contingent on hard and productive work:

6. I get more money.
7. The boss shows that he appreciates what I'm doing.
8. My chances of getting a better job improve.

Note that in adding the new, performance-contingent rewards, the first list of outcomes did not go away. Those outcomes are just as negative as they ever were and just as contingent on working hard as before.

So what will be the response of the brick loader to the new incentives? While we cannot predict with confidence how on-the-job behavior will change, we can be reasonably sure that the person will experience some internal stress and tension. The reason is that *no* behavior, neither loafing nor working extraordinarily hard, will lead to an optimal mix of work outcomes. Indeed, if we wished to drive someone insane, we might decide to do just what the brick loader's organization did: namely, arrange the work and the rewards so that strong *positive* and strong *negative* outcomes are *simultaneously contingent on the same behavior*. Under such circumstances, there is no way to win and no way to avoid the stress that derives from that fact.

Some of the problems of drug usage, alcoholism, and industrial sabotage that are observed in contemporary organizations may be rooted in precisely this state of affairs. That is, for some jobs, the work itself is arranged so that the harder one works the more negative the "intrinsic" outcomes received, but the organization is arranged so that hard work leads to positive "extrinsic" outcomes—or at least relief from negative extrinsic outcomes such as being "ridden" by one's supervisor.

On the other hand, if responses to the diagnostic question "What happens when you work especially hard?" reveal that productive work generally leads to positive outcomes (such as gaining a feeling of accomplishment, generating a useful product, providing an important service to others, or demonstrating competence on a tough job), then a solid basis for positive motivation already exists. Supplementing these built-in motivational incentives with performance-contingent extrinsic rewards can, in certain organizational circumstances, further reinforce employee motivation for hard and effective work.⁴

In sum, contingent rewards, when well selected and administered in appropriate organizational circumstances, can often enhance employee motivation and help people gain valued personal outcomes in return for their contributions to the attainment of organizational objectives. Yet the efficacy of contingent rewards, like that of the other approaches to change reviewed in this chapter, appears to depend substantially on how the work itself is designed. When jobs are poorly structured, then the use of performance-contingent rewards may result in a motivational "backlash." When, however, jobs are designed so that they provide built-in incentives for good performance, then performance-contingent rewards sometimes can help make an already decent motivational situation even better.

4 Motivational gains are not always realized when performance-contingent rewards are used on well-designed jobs, however. For one thing, providing extrinsic rewards for work on an interesting task can sometimes reduce the performer's *intrinsic* task motivation (Deci, 1975, Chapter 5). Moreover, certain organizational conditions (such as good measures of the desired performance outcomes and at least moderate trust between those who administer the rewards and those who receive them) may also be required if contingent rewards are to have their intended effects (see Chapter 6).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have reviewed a number of possible points of leverage for changing and improving the behavior and attitudes of people at work. We have suggested that these approaches, when used alone, may not be very powerful in bringing about real and lasting improvements in person-job relationships unless the *work itself* is also basically satisfactory to the individual. If a job is inherently dissatisfying, frustrating, or demotivating to the person who does it, then attempts to improve the overall person-job relationships using *only* the strategies reviewed in this chapter will be like swimming upstream against a very strong current.

The view of organizations suggested here can be illustrated through the device of a child's pegboard. The holes in the pegboard can be seen as jobs; the pegs, as the people who must fit those jobs. Traditionally what is done in staffing and managing organizations is to go to great lengths to get the pegs to fit the holes. Hundreds of pegs may be gathered (recruitment procedures) to find pegs that approximately fit the holes. Those that appear to be about the right size and shape are chosen (selection practices), assigned to the holes that seem the best match for them (placement), and then shaved and sanded to make the fit between the peg and the hole even better (training procedures). If the peg still won't go in the hole, then we may take the wooden hammer and beat on the peg a bit to force it in (supervisory practices and motivational programs).

At the risk of stretching further an already well-stretched analogy, the message of this chapter and this book is that perhaps we should be willing to change the holes as well as the pegs to achieve a good match—to try to achieve good person-organization relationships by adapting jobs to people as much as by adapting people to jobs. In the next chapter, we examine strategies for going about the design of jobs—ranging from traditional engineering approaches (which often result in the “fixed holes” into which people are placed) to state-of-the-art systems approaches that acknowledge the importance of adjusting *both* employees and jobs to achieve the best possible fit between people and their work.

FOR ADDITIONAL READING

- Guion, R.M. Recruitment, selection, and job placement. In M.D. Dunnette (ed.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology*. Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1976. This chapter provides a state-of-the-art review of techniques for personnel selection and placement. For a comprehensive review of existing theory and practice for training, see the chapter on “Personnel Training” by J. R. Hinrichs in the same volume.
- Vroom, V.H. Leadership. In M.D. Dunnette (ed.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology*. Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1976. A concise and lucid review of what is known about leader strategies for influencing subordinate attitudes and behaviors, and for improving decision making in organizations.
- Perrow, C. *Complex organizations: A critical essay* (2nd ed.). Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1979. Chapter 3 of this book provides a nice summary of the “Hawthorne” studies that gave rise to the human relations movement and then moves on to a critique as readable as it is scathing of behavioral science approaches for changing and improving organizations.
- Luthans, F., and D.D. White, Jr. Behavior modification: Application to manpower management. In J.R. Hackman, E.E. Lawler, and L.W. Porter (eds.), *Perspectives on behavior in organizations*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977. A sympathetic review of the usefulness and potency of behavior modification in organizations. For a cautionary note, see the article titled “Skinnerian Theory in Organizations” by W.F. Whyte, which follows the Luthans-White article in the same book.